

Democracy
Matters

Democracy Matters

The title 'Democracy Matters' is presented in two lines. The top line, 'Democracy', is in a light green font. The bottom line, 'Matters', is in a dark blue font. The letters are large and contain or are surrounded by small icons representing diverse individuals: a person with a speech bubble, a person in a wheelchair, a person with a cane, a person with a stroller, and a person with a speech bubble. A horizontal line is positioned below the title.

Your Community. Your Ideas. Your Future.

Facilitating a good community conversation

This guide is about how to run the community conversation so everyone taking part feels it was a good discussion. It provides some practical tips if you haven't got experience facilitating group discussions. If you are an experienced facilitator, they may serve as reminders.

Using facilitators to help guide the conversation

If you are holding a conversation involving more than 10-15 people, think about asking people to help guide and facilitate the conversation. A facilitator's job is to make help make the conversation easier for everyone who is taking part. This means taking a neutral role in the discussion itself.

The number of facilitators you may need will depend on how many people come along to a community conversation. Ideally, have one facilitator for every 10 or so people taking part, so you can have smaller groups to discuss the questions. Not everyone likes to speak up in a large group and this would help everyone have a chance to take part.

Democracy Matters asks people to think about the issues that matter to them in their community and to imagine new ways of community decision-making about those issues. Facilitators can help guide groups to have a good conversation by taking responsibility to:

- Keep the conversation on-track, to time, and focused on answering the questions
- Encourage dialogue and discussion, help the group consider differing views and opinions
- Help the group focus on specific answers to the questions and on practical ideas
- If there are different views that cannot be resolved, then record those views accurately
- Identify and intervene in any behaviour that disrupts the conversation
- Summarise the conversations, checking that the group agrees the summary
- End the meeting well with an identifiable result. This could be agreeing how to send the results of the conversation to the government.

Agreeing ground rules for a good conversation

It can be helpful at the beginning of the conversation to agree together a set of 'rules for good conversation'. These are a set of rules that everyone agrees to follow to help make sure that everyone feels included in the discussion and able to take part.

You might want to have some rules already written down (flipchart paper works well) to help start to discuss with the group, and ask them to suggest anything else that should be added. Rules could include for example:

- Respect everyone's right to speak without interruption.
- Be aware of how long and how often we speak. Help everyone have a chance to contribute.

- Listen to what other people are saying
- Speak for ourselves – ‘I think ...’ or ‘I feel ...’ rather than ‘everyone knows...’
- Don’t make personal attacks or put-downs.
- Don’t use language that could be offensive (not racist, sexist, ageist, swearing).

Write the rules down and place them somewhere for everyone to see. Ask the group to agree the rules by saying ‘yes’ out loud. The facilitator should get the group’s agreement to hold everyone to those rules throughout the conversation.

Making use of the information material

The range of **information material** on the Democracy Matters website www.gov.scot/democracymatters is designed to help people have good quality conversations and to make concrete practical suggestions about community decision-making.

If you are using facilitators, it is important that they take the time to read the **Democracy Matters questions** and **the guide to decision-making** before the conversation begins. Facilitators will need to be familiar with the information so they can answer questions and help highlight specific points.

On the day of the conversation, have available paper copies of **the Democracy Matters questions and the guide to decision-making**. Make sure you have enough copies for everyone who comes.

Allow time in the agenda for people to read both documents. You could have the paper copies ready so people can start to read them when they arrive for the community conversation. If you decide to start your event by offering tea & coffee or food, you could encourage people to use some of that time to read the material.

The short **animated film** will also help people understand the purpose of the Democracy Matters conversation. It could be shown before discussing the questions.

Making a record of the conversation

Facilitators will find it helpful to have someone else recording people’s views on the Democracy Matters questions. Check the accuracy of what is being written with the group. Try to be concise and record the key points of the discussion rather than everything that people say.

Ideally, use a different piece of paper to record views for each question. Write down the question number as a heading on each piece of paper.